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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 006036

SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Iran Nuclear Program

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Key stories in the media:  
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Jerusalem Post quoted officials in Washington as saying that Deputy U.S. National Security Advisor Steve Hadley will travel to Israel on Sunday for a day of meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials. The newspaper says that Elliott Abrams, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director of the National Security Council for Near East and North African Affairs, will accompany Hadley on the Israel leg of the trip, which will also include stops in Brussels and Bahrain. This morning, Jerusalem Post's web site cited a White House official as saying that the White House late Tuesday scrapped plans for Hadley's visit to Israel and the Palestinian areas, because of scheduling conflicts. The newspaper also quoted a U.S. official in Washington as saying that former U.S. ambassador to Kuwait Richard Jones is among people being considered for the job of next ambassador to Israel.

Maariv revealed that in secret contacts between Israel and Syria one year ago, Syrian President Bashar Assad had agreed to come to Jerusalem and speak to the Knesset, setting no preconditions, but that PM Sharon ignored his offer. Ha'aretz, Maariv and Israel Radio reported that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's spokesman Majed Abed Fatah took back a statement he had made about Syria giving up commitments made by the late PM Yitzhak Rabin. The spokesman said that the matter was not raised during Mubarak's meeting with Assad in Sharm el-Sheikh Tuesday. Ha'aretz and Yediot also reported that Walid Mualem, aide to the Syrian FM, denied Abed Fatah's earlier statement. Leading media quoted UN Middle East envoy Terje Roed-Larsen as saying in a rare appearance before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Tuesday that Israel should immediately call Assad's "bluff." Yediot reported that PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) is expected to tell Assad at their upcoming meeting in Damascus that the Palestinians could curb terrorist attacks in Israel, were it not for the activity originating from Damascus.

Leading media reported that Shinui is expected to vote against the 2005 budget and leave the government today. The media cited an announcement by the Shas party that it is prepared to support the budget in exchange for a change in the order of priorities in it. Most commentators believe that the coalition will not garner a Knesset majority for the budget today. Yediot writes that Sharon will contact Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres today in order to bring Labor into the government, in which Labor is not expected to receive key portfolios. Yediot cited hopes in the Likud that Sharon could form a broad-based coalition with Shas and United Torah Judaism, which would count 70 Knesset members.

All media reported that former PM Ehud Barak "stole the microphone and the show" (in Jerusalem Post's words) at the Labor Party's Central Committee meeting in Tel Aviv last night. Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, Peres was very critical of Barak. The media reported that the Labor Party's Central Committee postponed until December 12 a scheduled date for the party's leadership primary, thereby giving time for the current leadership to try to negotiate Labor's entry into the government. The postponement was a defeat for Barak,

who has been pushing, along with eight Labor Knesset members, to advance the primary to April 12.

Ha'aretz and other media reported that Israel has accepted Egypt's offer to beef up its forces on the border between Sinai and the Gaza Strip, deploying 750 troops in the area, and to train Palestinian officers. The media say that Israel will advise Egyptian FM Ahmed Abu el-Gheit and intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, who are due in Jerusalem today, of its decision. Jerusalem Post says that the talks will focus on the issue of arms smuggling to the Gaza Strip. Ha'aretz reported that Sharon told a delegation of American senators Tuesday that he would discuss with the Egyptian ministers "how Egypt is enlisting to reinstate stability in Gaza and to promote Israel's security coordination with the Palestinians."

Israel Radio reported that the U.S. Administration intends to transfer USD 20 million to the PA to cover the Authority's debts to Israeli companies.

Jerusalem Post quoted Palestinian FM Nabil Shaath as saying Tuesday in The Hague that Israel must reopen the voter registration offices it closed in East Jerusalem several months ago to ensure a free PA election. The newspaper quoted him as characterizing his meeting with FM Silvan Shalom as positive, adding that he and his Israeli counterpart stuck with general statements and did not go into specific details.

All media reported that Tuesday, overturning a previous ruling, the High Court of Justice found Shimon Sheves, former D-G of the Prime Minister's Office under Rabin, guilty of fraud and breach of trust. Sheves had been associated with American consultants James Carville Carville, Bob Shrum and Stan Greenberg, who worked for U.S. president Bill Clinton and vice-president Al Gore. Sheves was also a consultant for Romania's Social Democratic Party (PSD).

Ha'aretz reported that PA geographers working in the Palestinian Planning Ministry and Negotiation Support Unit have concluded that the map of alternate roads and passages for Palestinians only, which Israel has asked the donor countries to the Palestinians to finance, shows that Israel intends to strengthen its hold on most of the West Bank and leave the settlements intact.

Ha'aretz reported that Tuesday a Palestinian man photographed playing his violin at the Beit Iba checkpoint near Nablus in the West Bank earlier this month rejected claims by the IDF that he played of his own accord.

Jerusalem Post and other media reported that the Judea [southern West Bank] Military Court sentenced Abdullah Barghouti, a senior Hamas member and master bomb maker dubbed "the mechanic," to 67 consecutive life sentences for preparing the bombs used in a string of suicide bombings in 2001 and 2002.

Jerusalem Post quoted visiting Estonian PM Juhan Parts as saying that the EU should behave "more reasonably" in regards to UN resolutions on Israel.

Maariv lengthily interviewed Michael (Mike) Scheuer, who was the "head of the bin Laden unit in the CIA." Scheuer warns that support for Israel endangers America's security, and says that Israelis forget that the U.S. has a long history of abandoning allies when the price of those connections becomes too heavy.

Yediot reported that following heavy pressure by senior U.S. officials, Sharon recently appointed a team, to be headed by Prime Minister's Office D-G Ilan Cohen, that will check whether Israeli tenders and standards laws can be modified so that American companies can compete in tenders and projects. The newspaper says the U.S. is "very worried" by the continuing negative trade deficit with Israel: in 2003, Israeli exports to the U.S. amounted to USD 14 billion, while Israeli imports from the U.S. amounted to USD 6.5 billion -- a USD 7.5-billion gap. Yediot quoted Ambassador Dan Kurtzer as saying: "We are funding Israel's trade with Europe and we really dislike this. You are selling to the U.S., but buying in Europe. Israel needs to create fairer rules of the game vis-a-vis American firms."

Ha'aretz quoted Rep. Bob Beauprez (R-CO) as saying in Jerusalem Tuesday that America's Orthodox Jewish community has begun a long-term "love affair" with the Republican Party. Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge has presented his resignation to President Bush.

Jerusalem Post printed the full eulogy by Secretary Powell of the former U.S. diplomat Joseph Sisco.

A Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll found that: -65 percent of Israelis favor a new government; 33 percent favor a Likud-Shinui-Labor coalition; 17 percent favor a Labor-supported minority government; 15 percent favor a government composed of Likud, Labor and the ultra-Orthodox parties; 27 percent prefer early elections; 8 percent are undecided. -If elections were held today, Israelis would vote for: Likud: 42 Knesset seats (40 in the current Knesset); Labor Party: 23 seats (22); Shinui: 10 seats (15); Shas: 9 seats (11); National Union: 9 seats (7); Arab parties: 8 seats (8); Yahad: 5 seats (6); United Torah Judaism: 5 seats (5); and the National Religious Party: 4 seats (6).

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**1. Mideast:**  
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Summary:  
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Palestinian affairs correspondent and far-left Palestinian sympathizer Amira Hass opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The question is how the decision of the Palestinian cabinet, which even obligates the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), might serve ... against the Israeli policy of carving the Palestinian territory into enclaves and mutilating the two-state solution."

Nationalist writer Emuna Elon commented in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Right wants elections because it wants to return Yossi Beilin and the Geneva Accord to their natural place."

Columnist Shaul Schiff wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "The shrewd Abu Mazen intends to knock down to the ground all of Ariel Sharon's dreams, which are the basis for his disengagement plan."

Block Quotes:  
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**I. "A Surprising Decision by the PA Cabinet"**

Palestinian affairs correspondent and far-left Palestinian sympathizer Amira Hass opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 1): "Despite the short-term logic in accepting the [Israel-engineered] passages plan -- it would enable relatively free Palestinian movement in the West Bank after years of destructive internal closure -- the [Palestinian] cabinet decided to reject it completely. In this way, it signaled to the donor countries not to agree to finance the passages nor any other road without the approval of a special Palestinian inter-ministerial committee. That is, the cabinet did not only protest verbally, but also adopted a practical measure. This is surprising because since 1994, the PA has acted as if it is incapable of doing a thing to counter the Israeli policy of creating Palestinian enclaves in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.... The Palestinian Authority, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, acted as if it were a matter of force majeure, a deterministic process that no diplomatic or popular struggle could counter.... The question is how the decision of the Palestinian cabinet, which even obligates the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), might serve as leverage for a popular struggle -- Palestinian, Israeli and international -- against the Israeli policy of carving the Palestinian territory into enclaves and mutilating the two-state solution."

**II. "Who's Afraid of Moving Up the Elections?"**

Nationalist writer Emuna Elon commented in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 1): "Those greedy for 'disengagement' try to disparage the Right for wanting to move up the elections, which would delay the evacuation of settlements by at least six months. So what? Why does the Left oppose moving up the elections, if not in order to accelerate the uprooting? Yes, the Right wants elections because it wants to stop the pullout, to save the settlements, and to prevent a catastrophe. The Right wants elections because it wants to return Yossi Beilin and the Geneva Accord to their natural place, to take away from the Labor Party the mandates Likud -- and not Labor -- won, and to let the Israeli people decide -- not in public opinion polls but in elections -- for or against a move which is one of the most crucial of those ever planned by an Israeli government.... Will Sharon please go to

the people with his disengagement and let's see what happens."

### III. "What Has Abu Mazen Promised Barghouti?"

Columnist Shaul Schiff wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (December 1): "Abu Mazen, the West's darling, explains in all his private meetings that in order to obtain quiet in the Palestinian street, he need [Marwan] Barghouti's release. There no doubt is someone on the Israeli side who has promised it.... The shrewd Abu Mazen intends to knock down to the ground all of Ariel Sharon's dreams, which are the basis for his disengagement plan. Guided by Hosni Mubarak, Abu Mazen has already told the outgoing U.S. Secretary of State and senior European representatives that he is unhappy about the idea of an interim agreement. Backed by Mubarak, Abu Mazen strives to achieve a permanent-status agreement -- immediately after the elections for PA chairmanship. Any permanent-status move serves the interests of the PA; since the entire leadership of the West is asking for the '67 borders with slight amendments, at the United States' behest, a harsh confrontation is expected between Ariel Sharon and those Western leaders. It will be interesting to see how [Sharon] will steer the course between his deceptive visions and the pressure that will be applied on him."

## 12. Iran Nuclear Program:

### Summary:

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Iran is not the isolated country the U.S. wanted it to be when it imposed sanctions on it.... It is a regime that is not happy with the existence of Israel and would like to see it disappear, but not at the price of its own disappearance."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Through its nuclear program, Iran's mullocracy has managed to almost completely divert attention from its aggression and repression, the two attributes that were supposed to have made it an endangered species in the post-9/11 world."

### Block Quotes:

#### 1I. "The Charm of the Iranian Threat"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 1): "Iran is not Iraq of 2003. It is a state where most of the population is not happy with its economic circumstances, but not necessarily opposed to the governmental regime. Reformists are no less nationalistic than the conservatives.... And can anyone say which country is crazier: Iran or Pakistan, which has nuclear weapons, India, which threatens Pakistan with the use of its nuclear weapons -- and is now conducting talks with it -- or maybe North Korea, with whom the United States is ready to negotiate? It is also possible to ask, before Israel or the U.S. uses the ultimate weapon against Iran, why it is impossible [for instance] to pressure China to cancel its USD 100-billion gas deal with Iran?.... Even more interesting is that Iran has not minded for years doing business with friends of Israel. It even is begging for the renewal of diplomatic relations with Egypt, relations that Iran cut off in the wake of the Camp David accords. Iran is not the isolated country the U.S. wanted it to be when it imposed sanctions on it. It enjoys close ties with most of the countries of the world, and the ayatollahs' regime is not made up of suicide bombers. It is a regime that is not happy with the existence of Israel and would like to see it disappear, but not at the price of its own disappearance."

#### II. "Safe For Mullocracy"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 1): "What, after all, is the purpose of nuclear weapons for a regime like Iran? Some seem to assume Iran is a rational actor and therefore rule out various doomsday scenarios, such as it attacking Israel or providing terrorists with a nuclear weapon. We see

no reason to make such assumptions. Yet even if those scenarios are taken off the table, Iran is already accomplishing two other critical objectives: providing an umbrella for its support of terrorism and for its own repressive regime. The Associated Press reported this week that 300 men gathered openly in Teheran, in the presence of a government official, to sign up to become suicide bombers, either against Israelis or Americans..... Iran is the world's most open and enthusiastic state sponsor of terrorism. Its regime, much like that of the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, is aggressive, hated at home and ideologically bankrupt. Yet, through its nuclear program, Iran's mullocracy has managed to almost completely divert attention from its aggression and repression, the two attributes that were supposed to have made it an endangered species in the post-9/11 world..... Any deal that makes the world safer for Iran's mullahs makes it a lot less safe for the rest of us."

CRETZ